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**United States and Bahrain Discuss Strengthening Trade, Economic Relationship**

WASHINGTON - U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick and Bahraini Minister of Finance and National Economy Abdallah Saif discussed ways to deepen the U.S.-Bahraini economic relationship and improve bilateral trade ties in a meeting late yesterday at the office of the U.S. Trade Representative. The meeting took place under the auspices of the U.S.-Bahrain TIFA Council, a joint body created by the U.S.-Bahrain Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA).

"Increased trade and investment will play a key role in strengthening the vital strategic relationship we share with Bahrain," said Zoellick. "Bahrain has long been a key U.S. partner in promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, and as was discussed by President Bush and His Majesty King Hamad earlier this year, we are committed to strengthening the U.S.-Bahrain economic relationship, including through a possible free trade agreement."

"Bahrain is a regional leader in economic reform and trade liberalization, and we look forward to working together on the Doha global trade negotiations" said Zoellick. "The positive meetings between our officials exemplify the cooperative spirit with which both of our governments approach trade and investment liberalization."

This week's discussions follow-up on the inaugural meeting of the U.S.-Bahrain TIFA Council in October 2002. In addition to today's meeting, trade negotiators from both countries have been meeting throughout the week. Zoellick and Saif discussed Bahrain's progress at economic reform and trade liberalization since the October TIFA meeting. Such progress by Bahrain includes ensuring that policies regarding biotechnology do not serve as impediments to trade, active participation by Bahrain in the World Trade Organization services negotiations, beginning the process for Bahrain to accede to the World Intellectual Property Organization internet treaties, and ensuring an open trade environment for e-commerce. Zoellick and Minister Saif agreed that the two sides would meet later this year to take stock of progress.

The United States has TIFA agreements with a number of countries. These agreements strengthen bilateral trade and support economic reform through regular senior-level discussions on commercial and economic issues.

Bahrain is currently our 78th largest trading partner, with \$814 million in total (two way) goods trade during 2002. They are our 71st largest export market and our 76th largest supplier of imports. In 2002, U.S. goods exports to Bahrain totaled \$419.2 million. Goods imports from Bahrain were \$395.1 million. Top U.S. exports to Bahrain last year included: Aircraft (\$75 million), Machinery (\$55 million), Arms and Ammunition (\$54 million), and Vehicles (cars) (\$37 million).

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